

VZCZCXRO5897  
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSI #2086/01 3121525  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 071525Z NOV 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0376  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002086

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: OPPOSITION PROTEST FIZZLES OUT  
REF: TBILISI 2075

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES a.i. KENT LOGSDON REASONS: 1.4 (B) A  
ND (D).

11. (C) Summary: The November 7 opposition demonstration to commemorate last year's rally that turned violent drew a very modest turnout and was not attended by many leading opposition leaders. Protests were peaceful and police presence was limited with various speakers standing in front of the parliament addressing a crowd estimated at 4,000 to 6,000 attendees. A sizable portion of the crowd made an orderly trek to the Presidential Palace to hear Kakha Kukava (Conservative Party) "deliver" opposition demands via megaphone. Embassy observers put most of the demonstrators in the category of 50 years old or older. Major opposition figures such as former Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze, Davit Usupashvili (Republicans), and David Gamkrelidze (New Rights) shied away from the protest and decided not to attend. The opposition Christian Democratic party staged an alternative rally at Didube church to pray for the health of the Patriarch who underwent surgery in Berlin. Opposition MPs Gia Tortladze and Gia Tsagareshvili who recently formed a new political party (Democratic Party of Georgia) headed to Trinity Cathedral to pray for the unification of the country. As of 4:00 pm local time, the rally started to break up with observers noting more people leaving than joining the protest and demonstration was over by 6:00pm local time.

12. (C) Comment: This demonstration, held on a damp and rainy day in Tbilisi, can only be considered a failure for the no-so-united United Opposition. There was no interest from the public for its increasingly radical demands. The paltry turnout, coupled with the absence of Burjanadze, Usupashvili, Gamkrelidze, Christian Democrats and the recently formed National Democratic Party of Georgia, shows United Opposition solidarity is cracking with moderate leaders being unwilling to be identified with the more radical opposition members. Nevertheless, a number of lower-ranking opposition officials tied to Burjanadze, Usupashvili, and Gamkrelidze were seen mingling in the crowd, indicating these more moderate leaders are still not quite ready to distance themselves completely from the United Opposition. There was no sign of former Defense Minister Okruashvili, now living in France, who some thought might return to Tbilisi to lead the rally. Considering the massive turnout in support of the Government on August 15 after the conflict ended, the optics of the two rallies cannot be more stark. Stated plans to stage more protests over the next few months may be counterproductive to opposition aims for gaining support for their political agenda, unless public dissatisfaction with the Government begins to grow. End Comment.

Rally Calm, Leaders Praise and Criticize U.S. Role  
-----

13. (C) Embassy observers estimated the rally to be made up of 4,000 to 6,000 protesters. Various opposition members spoke to a largely subdued crowd. The police presence was minimal as both sides made good on promises to avoid

violence. Former Minister for Conflict Resolution, Goga Khaindrava addressed the crowd and lambasted EUR A/S Fried, DAS Bryza, and Ambassador Tefft for being blindly supportive of President Saakashvili. He listed a number of grievances which focused mainly on American support of Saakashvili and American mischaracterization of the opposition and its goals.

Khaindrava went on to opine that American support of Saakashvili was dwindling, citing A/S Fried's recent meeting with Georgian opposition leaders in Tbilisi as evidence. The crowd was largely unmoved with this line of argument, showing little or no reaction. Major opposition figures such as former Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze, Davit Usupashvili (Republicans), and David Gamkrelidze (New Rights), were absent from the rally.

¶4. (C) After the speeches, a sizable portion of the crowd made their way to the Presidential Palace to deliver their demands to President Saakashvili. The march was orderly and also completely without incident. After Khakha Kukava "delivered" the demands via loudspeaker, the crowd disbanded.

Kukava made special note during his speech in front of the Presidential Palace to thank the United States and the EU for standing by Georgia in a time of crisis. Parliamentary Chairman David Bakradze addressed the media while the march was ongoing saying that last year's events were a "bitter lesson," including for the authorities. He further stated that a permanent dialogue is necessary no matter how serious the political differences. Bakradze ended by saying that he was "...glad to say that today, on November 7, 2008, Georgia is more developed in terms of democracy, reforms, and unity than it was a year ago."

TBILISI 00002086 002 OF 002

#### Opposition Plans Clear for the Moment but Dubious

-----

¶5. (C) Before the protest, the United Opposition issued a five month action plan which again laid out opposition demands (ref A). Additionally, the action plan envisions a 24 hour picket of Imedi TV if the station is not returned to its "rightful" owner. In December, a new united political organization will be set up. This new union will purportedly lead the next stage of protest rallies. This includes a rally scheduled for January 25, to demand the annulment of the January 2008 Presidential and May 2008 Parliamentary elections and other rallies as yet to be determined. The action plan also details the United Opposition's intention to launch intensive meetings with people in the provinces to drum up support, after which it will launch an around the clock, permanent protest rally to begin on April 9, 2009 and continue until President Saakashvili and his government resigns. Judging by today's turnout, it will be hard to attract Georgians back to the streets unless public dissatisfaction with President Saakashvili and his government grows.

LOGSDON